

## Today's Church, Today's World - Still in Turmoil

This whole series of Bible bites on Prophecy is highlighting the statue of Nebuchadnezzar as detailed in Daniel chapter 2. Each part of the statue denoted a particular country or kingdom beginning with Babylon which is the heavy gold down to media Persia which was presented by silver; the next part of the body was, copper indicating Greece. The last part of the statue is the most interesting because it is not only the weakest of the metals but also the part in which we find ourselves today.

It is of course the Roman Empire which has existed from just before the time of Christ and will figure to be a substantial force in the coming years. The Roman Empire subjugated a large portion of the world that we now live in as well as Israel where Jesus was born and ministered. One of his titles is Prince of Peace yet did not bring peace to his country or to the world. Israel in fact was in turmoil within its own religious beliefs and in turmoil with the Roman authorities. Today we look at some of the forces arising out of this environment that has led us to where we are at this present time.

We know the Jewish leaders opposed Christ's teachings as well as making arrangements to have the Romans crucify Jesus himself. After the death of Jesus, the authorities then turned their attention to the apostles. The Sanhedrin was determined to wipe them out. After Jesus, Stephen was the next victim as recorded in acts where Paul the apostle himself witnessed this whole scene. He of course was also persecuting the Christians and in complete agreement with the stoning of Stephen. So, Jesus was killed; then Stephen one of Jesus followers. Here is the record for the rest of Jesus followers:

### Death of the Early Believers

**Matthew:** killed with a weapon that had a blade and spike in 60 C.E. in Ethiopia

**Mark:** dragged by horses through the streets in Alexandria, Egypt

**Luke:** hanged on an olive tree in Greece

**John:** boiled in oil, but delivered, only apostle to die peacefully.

**Peter:** crucified upside down on an x-shaped cross

**James the Just:** thrown over a hundred feet down at the pinnacle of the Temple, then beaten to death with a fuller's club

**James the Greater:** beheaded at Jerusalem in 44 C.E.

**Bartholomew (Nathanael):** flayed to death by a whip and crucified head down

**Andrew:** whipped severely by 7 soldiers, then crucified in Edessa

**Thomas:** stabbed with a spear in India

**Jude: (brother of Yeshua),** was killed with arrows

**Jude, (Jude Thaddeus)** was crucified in 72 A.D.

**Matthias:** was stoned and then beheaded in Jerusalem

**Barnabas:** stoned to death at Salonica

**Paul:** beheaded by the evil Emperor Nero

**SIMON the Zealot** was crucified

**Philip of Bethsaida,** crucified

**Judas Iscariot:** Shortly after the death of Christ Judas killed himself. According to the Bible he hanged himself, (Matthew 27:5)

The Jews were beginning their battles with the Christians who were now trying to come to grips with an identity all of their own. This eventually resulted in a radical change in the character and self-perceptions of both groups.

Meanwhile the Jews were also in a continuing battle with the Romans culminating with the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D; and a final battle at Masada. Herod had a palace on the top of this mount until his death in 4BCE. At that point, it became occupied by a Roman garrison. In 66 CE, a group of Jewish rebels, the Sicarii, overcame the Roman garrison of Masada with the aid of a ruse. After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, additional members of the Sicarii fled Jerusalem and settled on the mountaintop after slaughtering the Roman garrison.

According to Josephus, the Sicarii were an extremist Jewish splinter group antagonistic to a larger grouping of Jews referred to as the Zealots, who carried the main burden of the rebellion. Josephus said that the Sicarii raided nearby Jewish villages including Ein Gedi, where they massacred 700 women and children.

Interestingly, the date of the Roman destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D was exactly the same as the Babylonian destruction of the Temple in 586 BC.

In 73 A.D, the Romans decided to take back the fortress. When they breached the walls, they discovered that its 960 inhabitants had set all the buildings but the food storerooms ablaze and committed mass suicide or killed each other. After these two events, the Romans began to have an intense hatred for the Jews in the first century of the Common Era. The ramifications also manifested itself in the relationships physically and spiritually between the Messianic and Orthodox Jewish followers.

Between 70 and 130 AD the Jewish presence in the city of Jerusalem also grew and began to thrive again until they organized a second revolt against the Romans in 132 AD. In that year the Jews drove the Romans out of Jerusalem and began a temporarily successful attempt to rebuild the temple. Coins were minted by the Jews and

struck with the image of the rebuilt temple. These coins are also inscribed with the dates of the first, second or third year of this second Jewish revolt (called the Bar-Kokhba Revolt). The Jewish rebels controlled Judea and even re-struck Roman coins, inscribing on them:” *For the Freedom of Jerusalem*”

Following the 1st century Great Revolt and the destruction of the Temple, there came a shift of the center of religious authority from the Temple Priesthood to Rabbis. After the 2nd century Simon Bar Kochba revolt which brought about the destruction of Judaea, an ultimate reversal of the acceptance of the Jewish and Messianic beliefs developed among the Romans.

The Jews lost 985 of their villages when they were burned out of existence. Hadrian also had conquered Jerusalem and renamed Jerusalem "Aelia Capitolina" and rebuilt it as a Roman city with the status of a Roman colony. Jews were forbidden entrance into the city except once a year to mourn their fallen Temple.

Aelia refers to the clan name of Hadrian's family. Capitolina refers to the Capitoline Triad of supreme deities in Roman religion who were worshipped on Rome's Capitoline Hill: Jupiter, Juno and Minerva. Hadrian also renamed the land of Judea after the ancient enemies of Israel in the Old Testament, the Philistines. Judea became known as Palestine, or the land of the Philistines. (Do these names sound familiar in today's world).

Officially, the Jews were now without a "HOME" which remained that way for the next 1,800 + years. During this time, the Jews were almost like "Gypsies" because everywhere they went, they were persecuted. The hatred of the Jew even infected the "Gentile Christians" that became so ingrained that no less than a personage of the stature of Martin Luther expressed openly and in writing that the authorities should expel the Jews if they do not convert to Christianity.

Sadly, the Gentile Christians starting in the time of the persecution by Hadrian began to distance themselves from their Jewish roots. For the first time Messianic Jews were no longer allowed to be leaders of the Messianic meetings. Because of the pressures by the authorities against any religion except that of the roman gods including Emperor Worship, Gentile believers began to develop their own beliefs and practices.

Still, the Romans saw the Christians as a subset of Jews who had already been granted special privileges because of their unusual religion and, in return, delivered little more than a ragged promise of peaceful cooperation. Gentile Christians began to shed anything that smacked of Jewishness, including how they worshipped - particularly the observance of feasts and Sabbaths.

It had little effect on the Roman authorities. Anyone who was not obeisant and totally loyal to the Roman "Pax Romana was thrown to the lions. The famed persecutions of Christians reached their worst during this period.

As the persecutions died down, Christians began to define their own ideals. The epistles of Paul influenced them more than the Torah and other books of the Old Testament. The Christians (mostly Gentiles by this time) began to reason that since the Jews had been abandoned by God, it was the Gentile Christians who now inherited all the blessings that had been promised to the Jews. This began the doctrine of "Replacement Theology" that is so predominant in the churches of today. This doctrine is absolutely contrary to the Eternal Covenants of God.

The Christians then began to take many of the writings of the rabbis on the interpretations of the Old Testament and placed them alongside the doctrines they were developing as the core of their tenets. That is why the Roman Catholic Church and other older established denominations put traditions on a level with the word of God.

Another step made by the believers was to set up a structure similar to what God had instructed Moses to do, especially establishing an order of priesthood with its attendant privileges. It was a logical step to other official religious offices as well. If you look at the layout of the altars of the RCC, you will see a place in the middle of the altar which seems like an enlarged container. Usually it is quite elaborate and contains a door. When the door is opened, there is a veil which screens the contents. This whole structure is called a Tabernacle.

When the veil is spread apart, there is a smaller container holding the host, usually round shaped. This is regarded as the body of Christ. Over time, the host was thought to change substance to become the actual body of Christ. This belief (Transubstantiation) became an item of heated controversy among the Protestants starting with Martin Luther.

The first four hundred years defined our religion today, much of which would be so foreign that neither Jesus nor the original believers would even recognize it. Most of what we take for granted now was coalesced under the reign of Constantine.

Constantine was not a Christian. He did abolish persecution of Christians to the point of making Christianity the official religion of his kingdom. His next step was to establish one set of beliefs. Next week, we will cover the steps he took even to moving the day of worship from Sabbath to Sunday. He actually combined elements of Emperor Worship with the new religion commingled with pagan practices honoring a false god

**Shalom.**